UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/ICEF/1998/P/L.5
17 November 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
First regular session 1998
26-28 and 30 January 1998
Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

FOR INFORMATION

SUMMARY OF MID-TERM REVIEWS AND MAJOR EVALUATIONS OF COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

South Asia region

SUMMARY

The present report was prepared in response to Executive Board decision 1995/8 (E/ICEF/1995/9/Rev.1) which requested the secretariat to submit to the Board a summary of the outcome of mid-term reviews and major country programme evaluations, specifying, inter alia, the results achieved, lessons learned and the need for any adjustment in the country programme. The Board is to comment on the reports and provide guidance to the secretariat, if necessary. As no mid-term reviews were conducted in the South Asia region in 1997, the present report describes selected evaluations conducted during 1997.

INTRODUCTION

1. The selected evaluations described in the present report were conducted in South Asia during 1997 and illustrate the diversity of UNICEF evaluation work. Some are "summative" evaluations, i.e. they have been conducted once a pilot or exploratory phase has been completed, and draw conclusions about impacts, while others are "formative" in so far as they are meant to contribute to programme development in process. The intended primary users of the evaluations also vary. In some cases, the main intended users are decision makers at community and district levels, while in others they are programme managers and policy makers at national and international levels. The descriptions are based on summaries prepared for the UNICEF evaluation database.

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MAJOR COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS

Universal salt iodization, Bangladesh

2. Iodine deficiency is the major cause of mental retardation in Bangladesh. A 1993 national iodine deficiency disease survey revealed that 0.5 per cent of the population suffered from cretinism, 47 per cent had symptoms of goitre and 70 per cent suffered from sub-clinical iodine deficiency. In order to eliminate iodine deficiency, the Government enacted the universal iodized salt law in 1989 and undertook a salt iodization programme with UNICEF support which included equipping all 264 salt factories in the country with salt iodation plants.

3. Effective enforcement of legislation requires a credible system for assessing compliance against programme standards. In Bangladesh, salt iodation plants are expected to produce iodized salt with 45-50 parts of iodine per million parts (ppm) of salt. This level will ensure that, with reasonable quality packaging and average shelf life, the salt at household level will have an iodine concentration of at least 15 ppm. Requirements for iodine can be met if this concentration is maintained, given average daily salt consumption levels.

4. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of iodine distribution by measuring the concentration of iodine in salt in a systematic manner at various points along the salt delivery chain throughout the country. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders was intended to stimulate a broad discussion of progress of the iodization programme and to encourage national ownership of the monitoring and evaluation process. The groups participating in the evaluation included the Institute of Public Health Nutrition; the Institute of Epidemiology; Disease Control Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council; Charity International; Jagganath University College; Dhaka University; the Institute of Nutrition, Food Science and Technology; Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation; International Council for Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders; the Institute of Statistical Research and Training; private salt manufacturers; and retail shop owners.

5. Salt was sampled from all production and packaging plants open at the time of the survey. Salt from retail shops and households was assessed, using a two-stage stratified random sample with urban and rural strata. Three separate questionnaires were used for factories, retail shops and households. Salt samples from each of these points were also collected in separate polythene bags. The salt collected was sorted and sent to six laboratories for biochemical estimation of iodine content. The quality of this examination was controlled by cross-checking about one third of the samples between laboratories and sending control samples to each laboratory for comparison.

6. Over one half (138 out of 264) of the factories that had been supplied iodation equipment were open at the time of the survey. Ninety-nine per cent of the salt collected from the factories contained iodine. Nearly one half (45 per cent) of the salt sampled lacked sufficient iodine. Of the remainder of the samples containing adequate iodine, most was within the range safe for health. However, samples from 17 factories were found to contain more than 1,000 ppm iodine. Salt samples from 820 retail shops (477 rural and 343 urban) showed that 66 per cent contained adequate iodine. A majority of retail shop owners (71 per cent) in rural and urban areas were aware of the benefits of iodized salt, but most (84 per cent) were unaware of the existing legislation.

7. Among the 1,113 salt samples from households that were analysed, 43 per cent contained adequate iodine. Just over one half of the households used only packet salt, which improves the retention of iodine, while a large number of households used both packet and loose salt. Three quarters of households stored salt in closed containers. In urban areas, most of the households had been using iodized salt for more than one year, but in rural areas, a majority of the households had started using iodized salt only within the last year.

8. In conclusion, most salt in Bangladesh was found to be iodized at the time of the assessment, but the iodine content at factory, retail shop and household level is often not within acceptable limits. More publicity is needed to create awareness among the public about the benefit of iodized salt. To avoid variations of iodine content in the factories, monitoring of spraying and mixing of potassium iodate with water needs to be improved. Machine operators should receive frequent training in the correct process for iodization. The food inspectors responsible for testing salt samples also need better training and motivation. Salt-testing laboratories using titration should be established in each zone of salt factories, and the iodine content of salt produced by each factory should be checked by batch. There should be a label stating the factory, date of manufacture and batch number on the packet. Rapid salt-testing kits already supplied to the factories should be rechecked to see whether the titration value matches the strip colour test results. Finally, the iodine deficiency disorder (IDD) elimination programme continues to require high priority from political and administrative leadership and civil society at large.

Universal salt iodization, Bhutan

9. The previous report on major evaluations described the initial results of an evaluation of salt iodization in Bhutan, in which it was found that the proportion of iodized salt used at the household level had decreased from 95 per cent in 1992 to 85 per cent in 1996. By the end of 1996, the communication of the results of the evaluation to the Government and the public had only just begun. It is now possible to report more fully on the dissemination and use of the evaluation findings.

10. Evaluation results were distributed through the annual national health conference, other professional and programme meetings and the media, thus increasing the profile of IDD in the Government and among the public. The national iodine monitoring system was redesigned to involve schoolteachers and students. Primary health care workers, as well as laboratory technicians based in district hospitals, have been trained in iodine monitoring techniques. Monitoring at the national salt plant has been re-established. The national IDD communication strategy has been strengthened with high-level political support. The supreme religious head, His Holiness the Je Khenpo, signed a statement in support of IDD programmes on 30 August 1997 at a ceremony attended by ministers and senior officials of the health services. The statement, together with an information leaflet on IDD, are being distributed widely throughout Bhutan.

11. The close involvement of the Government in the data collection phase of the evaluation helped to increase commitment to the programme and has improved the profile of nutrition activities. The quality of salt packaging has been improved, and support from UNICEF has been sought to help purchase a new iodization plant to replace the old one. Overall, the evaluation contributed directly to a revitalization of the national IDD programme, and there is a strong commitment and means to achieve the year 2000 goal.

National immunization days, India

12. For the past two years, India has held two special nationwide immunization days, six weeks apart in December (1995 and 1996) and January (1996 and 1997). The goal of the 1996/1997 round was to vaccinate all children under the age of five years with polio vaccine. This represented a modification of the 1995/1996 design, in which children under the age of three years were targeted. The campaign is likely to be continued for the coming few years until polio is eradicated from the subcontinent. A survey conducted in 1996 to estimate the coverages of the national immunization days from the previous year indicated very high coverage levels, with a sharp reduction in the number of reported polio cases in 1996. The same procedure was followed in 1997 to estimate coverage in the second year of the programme. UNICEF was a partner in organizing the evaluation, which also included various levels of Government, Rotary International and various bilateral donors, including the United States Agency for International Development, the Government of Japan and the Department for International Development (United Kingdom). Data were collected from 52,000 randomly selected households (16,000 in rural areas and 36,000 among urban poor populations in cities), representing a large part of the country.

13. The national immunization days reached approximately 195 million children, or 98 per cent of all children under five years of age. Ninety-five per cent of children received the first dose and 98 per cent received the second dose of polio vaccine, with about 93 per cent receiving both the first and second doses. Results showed an increase in coverage of 8 per cent over the previous year.

14. The experience to date indicates that it is possible to maintain high coverage in India through national immunization days. However, certain areas and population groups require increased attention in the third year of the campaign, starting in December 1997, including scheduled tribe concentrations and the urban poor. Coverage can be improved further in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Meghalaya through concerted mobilization efforts carried out through the media and with the participation of civic groups.

Gender gap in primary education, Pakistan

15. A key strategy to promote awareness of child rights in Pakistan is the strengthening of formative programme evaluation capacities of government institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civic organizations, and conducting formative evaluations that examine progress towards reducing violations of children's rights. In relation to upholding the different rights of children and women, the UNICEF country programme evaluation plan aims for the groups of "duty-bearers" to work together in evaluations to assess the degree to which individual rights, or clusters of related rights as appropriate, are being violated. The effectiveness of efforts to reduce the violation of rights is then examined. This facilitates a process of dialogue and plan reformulation aimed at moving society closer into compliance with the stipulations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

16. In ratifying the Convention, the Government committed itself to fulfil the right of every child to a good education and to achieve this goal by 2002. A national survey in 1995 showed that 31 per cent of primary school-age children are deprived of their right to education. The majority of these children are girls. The formative evaluation reported here is part of UNICEF support to improve progress towards achieving the national goal.

17. A steering committee and technical subcommittee was established at the provincial level, with representatives from all relevant line departments. The committee participated in the decision to focus on girls' education, assisted in the design of survey instruments, ensured the participation of staff of the respective departments in the field work, and participated in the analysis and action workshops where key findings were discussed and programme and communication actions were identified and prioritized. Other participants included community members, community-based organizations, NGOs, district-level officials, provincial-level planners and policy makers. Householders learned to assess and evaluate their situations and to look for solutions through their involvement in data collection and discussion of preliminary analysis findings. NGOs were engaged as much as possible as key partners in data collection, data entry, and implementation and follow-up of priority actions. The provincial bureaux of statistics are increasingly involved in site selection, data collection and data entry. UNICEF collaborates with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in providing technical and financial support.

18. The evaluation process looked beyond the walls of the schools alone, into the communities, to identify the reasons for non-enrolment and drop out. The assessment phase combined quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The availability of skills, facilities and resources in the schools were reviewed. Teachers were interviewed about their qualifications, training and attitudes. Costs to the households of potential programme approaches were calculated. Opinion makers and community members were consulted in feed-back focus groups about the feasibility of programme solutions.

19. A panel of sentinel communities was surveyed, using a sample stratified at provincial and district levels. An average of 40 sites per provide were selected, including some in focus districts of the Government-UNICEF programme of co-operation. In the last 16 months, the process has covered three of Pakistan's four provinces (Sindh, North-West Frontier and Balochistan) and six focus districts. A total of 20,000 households have been interviewed. Institutional reviews took place in 500 schools. Some 400 focus groups were held to discuss the preliminary findings and possible actions. Nine workshops were held to agree with the community representatives and other key duty-bearers on short- and long-term, high-impact, feasible and sustainable interventions. Ten government-led subcommittees are in place, six at district level and three at provincial level, to identify actions and mobilize efforts to improve girls' school enrolment.

20. The results show a complex pattern of factors affecting primary education in Pakistan and a wide range of current programmes. Each district and province shows its own picture, reflecting the diversity of culture and socio-economic development in the country. For example, in Balochistan, it was found that the availability of separate schools for girls and toilets might well increase female enrolment significantly. In Sindh, the provision of free textbooks and the existence of functioning parent-teacher associations were found to have a positive effect on enrolment. In a focus district in North-West Frontier Province, the availability of drinking water and the education of mothers were identified as the key factors with a positive impact on girls' enrolment. While in most of provinces and districts there is a significant gender gap in enrolment, an encouraging situation was found in Rawalpindi district (population over 3 million), with 85 per cent enrolment and no gender gap.

21. The evaluation process has contributed to capacity-building in different ways. Strong partnerships are developing with some provincial NGOs and the

provincial bureaux of statistics. District government teams have become involved in girls' education issues in spite of frequent transfers and a heavy workload in law and order and judiciary tasks. In North-West Frontier Province, the three district commissioners of the selected focus districts presented the key findings and facilitated the participation of district officials in the action and communication workshops. In Rawalpindi, the involvement of the district team was brought one step further. Over a period of three, weeks the district team worked in groups to develop a district action plan aimed at ensuring universal access to free primary education. Meetings were held with community-based organizations, NGOs, technical institutes and donors to fine tune plans and identify human and financial resources and responsible organizations, and to establish a time-frame for implementation of identified interventions. Within UNICEF, project agreements have been amended or finalized, taking into consideration the findings of the evaluation.

22. The core of the evaluation process is the dialogue between different duty-bearer groups on their views regarding the reasons for the continued violation of the rights in question. Underpinning these discussions are the measures of impact, coverage and costs of existing programmes. The extent of the problem is documented and the effectiveness of available programmes is evaluated. An attempt is made to develop or strengthen a mutual understanding of the values that influence whether or not children are sent to school. The approach is based on the principle that for the culture to change, households and communities need to be engaged in the assessment of their own situation and its causes, and their views must be sought about possible actions to improve the situation.

23. As a result of the interest generated in Sindh and Balochistan, UNDP co-financed the process in North-West Frontier Province as part of their programme to help support better governance. The provincial governments of North-West Frontier and Balochistan provinces have requested UNDP to continue its support in future cycles looking at other rights issues. Other donors are considering support to the evaluation process.

24. Within the UNICEF programme of cooperation, this process forms part of the strategy to examine different child rights issues, with a view to assisting in the identification of programme actions, some of which might be supported by UNICEF and others supported from other sources. The second cycle of this formative evaluation work will address the subject of sanitation. Building of national capacities will enable major elements of the process to be addressed by the Government and NGOs in the future. The information that is being generated will also contribute to the major evaluation of UNICEF cooperation in the education sector planned to take place near the end of the current country programme period.

Improving the quality of education in small schools, Sri Lanka

25. Under the 1992-1996 Government of Sri Lanka-UNICEF programme of cooperation, the National Institute of Education carried out an action research project to develop interventions to improve the quality of primary education in small schools. Small schools are those with less than 200-300 children, all of whom come from the most disadvantaged population groups.

26. The objective of the action research was to test different means of improving education quality. The project was carried out in 50 small schools, five each from 10 divisions. Project activities included developing school

agricultural plots as a learning and teaching aid, using the mid-day meal as a learning and teaching exercise, spot training to help identify weaknesses and find solutions, training in multigrade teaching to overcome teacher shortages, identifying learning disabilities, English teaching within a rural context, developing monitoring instruments for teachers and pupils, promoting "library in a box" to promote reading, the use of wallpaper to encourage creative activity and information sharing, activities for school-community cooperation, and home gardening.

27. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the approaches, materials and processes adopted in the 50 schools have had an impact on the overall development of small schools. The evaluation sought to determine (a) the extent to which the new approaches had been effective in improving learning content, teaching and learning methods and materials, school management practices and school-community relations; and (b) the improvement, if any, in learning achievement and other behaviourial characteristics of students.

28. The Sri Lanka Association for Advancement of Education carried out the evaluation. The evaluation team included a staff member of the Primary Education Department of the National Institute of Education, and a UNICEF education staff member. Data collection consisted of interviews with key informants, including parents, and observations in the schools.

29. Some of the new approaches developed in the project - student-centred teaching, multigrade teaching, spot training, "library in a box" and the wallpaper - are practical to implement and can be effective in improving the quality of primary education in disadvantaged schools. The agriculture plot and mid-day meal have not shown demonstrable success owing to resource requirements, environmental conditions and the capabilities of the primary school child; these activities were viewed by some parents and teachers as distracting from the purpose of schooling. It was found that the impact of the new approaches could have been more fully achieved if implementation had been followed up after the introduction and experimentation phase. The lack of regular mechanisms for monitoring student achievement and appraising the performance of teachers, principals and education officers made implementation suffer except in those few schools where the principals and teachers were exceptionally motivated.

30. The results of the evaluation were presented to the project implementors. The discussion that followed generated a number of practical recommendations for the introduction of new approaches in education. The active involvement of and ownership by the provincial and zonal authorities who are responsible for education in their respective zones is essential for the implementation of new approaches. The new approaches in teacher training, student-centred activities and monitoring should be integrated into the national curriculum for small schools. The provincial education authorities should be the main agency for implementing the new approaches in their respective areas. The role of the National Institute of Education should be facilitating and catalytic in developmental work of this nature. An effective monitoring mechanism and performance assessments, combined with incentives for teacher performance, should be established to enable effective implementation of the new approaches. Such processes should be set up in close collaboration with principals, teachers and parents.

CONCLUSION

31. Evaluation performance in South Asia has been mixed. A large number of assessments and studies are carried out in some countries, but in general there are few systematic evaluations of programme impact or cost-effectiveness. Experience with specific evaluations demonstrates their usefulness in achieving policy and programme objectives for children. An initial regional monitoring and evaluation plan has been developed. Country-level monitoring and evaluation plans have been prepared for several countries and they are currently being strengthened.

32. The Regional Management Team spent a day discussing evaluation in UNICEF programmes of cooperation in South Asia and reached a number of conclusions. Priority to evaluation must be increased in UNICEF management culture in the region as an important part of developing a learning and knowledge-based organization. Evaluation-related milestones should be defined and instituted in the country programming cycle - particularly in the mid-term review, and also in the situation analysis, country programme strategy, master plan of operations and annual programme reviews. Each office should prepare and regularly update its evaluation plan. Heads of office should be involved in the management of selected evaluations for maximum impact. Extra attention should be given to the communication and dissemination of results within each country.

33. The evaluation capacity of country teams must be increased. Heads of office should ensure that programme section chiefs and staff include evaluation in their work plans. Adequate time needs to be devoted to evaluation in relation to other planning and programme tasks. In the larger offices in the region, senior staff positions may need to be created for evaluation and monitoring. The status of evaluation work and evaluation staff needs to be enhanced. Incentive systems for these purposes should be explored in each office, including in performance evaluation reports. Staff should be encouraged to participate in evaluation training within UNICEF as well as outside of the organization, and to join relevant professional networks.

34. Evaluations need to assess more clearly the effectiveness and efficiency of UNICEF-supported programmes for children. Greater attention should be given to cost analysis within evaluations. More effort needs to be put into communicating the results of evaluations with counterparts, donors and other organizations. Findings should be included, to the extent possible, in donor reports and Executive Board papers.

35. Evaluation methods will continue to be refined and improved. Evaluation in a rights framework will require increasing attention to stakeholder assessments, including at the community level, as are being developed in some countries in the region. National capacity should be further strengthened for evaluation in Government, NGOs and other groups.

36. Thematic evaluations are carried out to determine the effectiveness of multi-country programmes and to identify lessons across geographical and cultural settings. In South Asia, a regional thematic evaluation of UNICEF support for universal salt iodization programmes is being conducted and will be completed in 1998. Multi-country evaluations of UNICEF support for polio eradication, education and water and sanitation programmes are being initiated in 1998.